4:Armellada M-5 (no date) 1960
SS16 Pemon SS16

VENEZUELA

THE KAMAINO (OMENS) OF THE PEMON INDIANS

The following article is by the Capuchin missionary Fray Cesáreo de Armellada who forms part of the Mission to which the Venezuelan government has entrusted the care of various Indian groups of the states of Zulia and Bolívar. The author has dedicated himself to the compilation and study of the "oral literature" of the *Pemon* Indians since 1931. Various of his works have been published previously in this *Boletín*.

In studying the mentality of these *Pemón* Indians, we come up against this word *Kamainó* which literally means "he who or that which means", and which in use is equivalent to our "oracle" and "omen". For them, our futures are present times which keep approaching until they are before our eyes; but sharp-sighted eyes or an oracle can go forward to meet them like a bird, who soaring at a certain altitude sees coming what we yet cannot see.

The spirit liberated from the body during a dream (according to their belief) and the *piache* when he is in a trance and also free from the bodily enclosure through the use of vegetable drugs, are the great *kamainó* or oracles. And dreams should be considered as the commonest omens or predictions. Dreams are always interpreted on the basis of similarity, which is the great principle and the great error of these Indians: to think that the similar has an effect upon the similar (e. g., a leaf shaped like a deer's ear, into the deer); that the name and the image are the thing named or represented not only in language or in art, but also in the field of chance; that sickness of one member of the family will necessarily and physiologically have a repercussion on all of the relatives, etc.

Here we limit our study to certain natural occurrences which many times we have heard the *Pemón* Indians interpret as omens or warnings of things that are going to happen. I have always asked, how can a spider know this, how can a chicken know more than we do. And the answer were always the same: "truly it is strange, but so it is".

The principal *kamainó*, heard interpreted as omens by the Indians during the years of our stay among them, are:

[R72 contains no English TEXT--Analyst]

4:Armellada M-5 (no date) 1960

SS16 Pemon SS16

If a *modoi* (species of a very tiny spider) hangs within the buse (spins his web) it means that a traveler will come to hang up his web or hammock. 787 82

If a flea bites an Indian it is a sign that Indians are coming to his house.

If a boy falls from a hammock, it is a sign that he is going to be crazy.

If a bat hovers above the smoke of our home, it is a sign that our hunters will find a deer.

If on the road we stumble, it means that we are going to meet travelers coming in the opposite direction.

If a *rioma* (kind of bird) whistles *kui-pi, kui-pi*, he is saying: "a deer is hidden over there."

If a rooster or a hen crows at night at unusual hours, it means that one of our acquaintances is speaking against us.

If our ears ring, it means that we are going (warning of death). In this case the Indians strike their ears as one who shoos away flies and say: *etë pai pra edai* (I don't wan to go).

When the clouds are tinged with red, it's a sign that spotted tigers are being born.

When an Indian is weaving something and his legs go to sleep, he says: "it's a sign that they are going to buy it."

When the eyelids twich (with those involuntary wormlike movements), it is a sign that some one of our relatives is dying. [763]

When a stick crackles as it burns, it is a sign that some one of our relatives is suffering.

The above is sufficient for our readers to form an idea how the *Pemón* Indians think in relation to omens.

764 Although the body thus came to be left in the grave, no attempt was
177 made to mark or maintain the site until very recently. Now a cross is sometimes erected — there are two in the cemetery at Uruyén and one grave (a prone burial) has a light cane railing around three sides. These are evident attempts to copy burials seen in Venezuelan villages, as reported by the two or three traveled individuals who have seen them. Of course no inscriptions are
769 used and no care is taken of the plots. There is no cult of the dead and no offerings are placed on the grave.

Notions of Time

805 The few relatively sophisticated, Spanish-speaking Indians are aware of
[177] the European calendar and system of reckoning time and will sometimes speak of months, hours, and other decidedly non-Kamarakoto concepts. It is evident, however, that even they have no definite means of telling what time it is and do not accurately know the hour or month or date. These foreign concepts are as yet quite unknown to the bulk of the tribe and of no practical use to the few who realize that they exist. The Kamarakotos have no definite time system. They recognize and designate the time of day by the height of the sun, and speak of dawn, morning, evening, early or late in the day, and so on, as we do when deprived of timepieces, but have no fixed subdivisions of the day. They reckon days for rather short intervals that are important to them, but keep no permanent or continuous record. They seem, for instance, to have no idea of how many days there are in a year and usually are quite unable to tell how many days have elapsed since an event more than a week or two in the past.

There is probably no recognized unit between the day and the year. Our interpreter spoke sometimes of months, but I could not observe that the Indians really kept any track of the phases of the moon or used them to reckon time, although I might be mistaken in this. They do, of course, recognize the year as a succession of one rainy and one dry season and within each of their two
● [82] seasons they are usually well aware of relative position. For instance, they can predict rather accurately when the season is due to change and they know at about what time various fruits will ripen, flowers bloom, birds lay eggs, and so on. No continuous record of years is kept and there is almost no perception of long spans of elapsed time beyond such expressions as "when I was young," "in my father's time," "when so-and-so built his house," and so forth. No Kamarakoto has any real idea of his own age or of that of his children. Even for young children the birth of whom was still vividly in mind, statements regarding age were often manifestly absurd.

In summary, the Kamarakotos appear to be about as completely devoid of any chronological sense, system, terminology or records as rational beings can be.